

CANNOCK CHASE COUNCIL
MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE
HOUSING POLICY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE
MONDAY 20 JANUARY, 2014 AT 4.00 P.M.
IN THE CIVIC CENTRE, BEECROFT ROAD, CANNOCK

PART 1

PRESENT: Councillors:

	Kraujalis, (Chairman)	
	Grice, Mrs. D. (Vice-Chairman)	
Allen, F.W.C		Toth, J.
Molineux, G. N.		Bernard, Mrs. A. F.
Bottomer, B (substitute for Dudson, A)		Jones, J.L.

By invitation: Councillor Mrs. M. A. Davies, Health and Wellbeing Portfolio Leader

17. Apologies

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Allt, Mrs. A

Councillor B. Bottomer was in attendance as Councillor A. Dudson's nominated substitute.

18. Declarations of Interests of Members in Contracts and Other Matters and Restriction on Voting by Members

No other declarations of interests were made in addition to those already confirmed by Members in the Register of Members' Interests.

19. Minutes

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 21 October 2013 be approved as a correct record and signed.

20. Norton Canes Photovoltaic Panel Pilot Scheme – Further Evaluation

Consideration was given to the Head of Housing and Waste Management Report on Norton Canes Photovoltaic Panel Pilot Scheme – Further Evaluation (Item 4.1 – 4.7).

The Head of Housing and Waste Management gave the background to the Pilot scheme and the further evaluation. He explained that the results of the scheme had been encouraging. This had led to the invitation being sent to Southern Staffordshire Community Energy to attend the meeting. He further explained

that there were not many organisations who would provide PV Panels though 'roof lease schemes' as a result of the reduced 'feed in tariffs' impacting on the 'rate of return'

An outline proposal had been submitted to the Greater Birmingham and Solihull LEP for European Funding to assist with the installation cost of panels for further dwellings. However, he explained that the outline proposal may not be successful and that the Council was not relying on this money.

RESOLVED:

The report was noted

21. Provision of Community owned Photovoltaic Panels to Further Dwellings within the Council's Housing Stock

Mike Kingham (Chair) and Dough Haig introduced themselves from Southern Staffordshire Community Energy (SSCE) which is an Industrial and Providence Society. They gave the background to how this was set up and why. Mr Kingham explained what work had been undertaken in their own village with regards to photovoltaic panels on dwellings and on community buildings. He confirmed that the energy cost savings in relation to Cannock Chase District Councils pilot scheme was at 30% on a similar level to their own.

SSCE had raised funds for the panels for the community buildings through investment from shareholders who would get an annual 4-5% return on their investment. He explained that the shares could not be traded and could only be sold back to the Society after three years.

At present the Sunny Schools Project was being progressed with Staffordshire County Council and involved PV Panels being installed on 25 schools.

The proposal for Cannock Chase was that 150-300 Council dwellings would be identified and checked for suitability; southern facing; well maintained; dwellings were in a cluster.

The benefits would be approximately a 30% reduction of electricity bills for tenants.

Any surplus income would be reinvested in the project and energy efficiency training. The surplus would be the money that was left after the shareholders had received their 5%.

SSCE explained that at the moment the figures were provisional as until the stock had been surveyed and the properties identified it was difficult to judge how many panels would be needed. However, they were confident that the figures that they were projecting were broadly accurate.

The panels would be linked to a computer which would know how much electricity had been generated for each property. By monitoring this computer Southern Staffordshire Community Energy would know if something was wrong. Although the panels would be leased for approximately 20-25 years the inverter which converts the energy for the national grid would be changed at least once during this period.

Members supported moving forward with the project and requested information on the selection of properties.

There was an advantage for the bungalows as many of their residents were elderly and at home during the day so could take advantage of the electricity; the bungalows were clustered together; they would be cheaper to install as the scaffolding costs would not be as high. However, this would need to be decided at a later date with all the relevant information in a full report.

Members queried whether there would be any internal work and whether this would create mess. There would need to be some internal work regarding the fitting of an inverter which would need to be mounted close to the meter and the wiring from the panels. This could cause a small amount of disruption during the installation.

Members agreed they had a part to play regarding energy efficiency and that it needed to be economically viable. Members wanted to ensure that where the dwellings were chosen for this scheme that these had a geographical spread across the district. Members also wanted reassurance that if a tenant did not want to take part they would not be forced. A robust consultation process needed to be followed.

Members asked whether this scheme would apply to privately owned as well as rented properties and what would happen if someone wanted to sell the property. The answer from the Southern Staffordshire Community Energy was that the property would be sold subject to PV Panel lease. If a private owner wanted to join the scheme they could potentially do this subject to a separate agreement. Ideally the property would need to be in one of the cluster locations.

Members questioned what would happen after the lease had expired. SSCE answered that the panels could either be gifted to the Council or the lease could be renewed or they could be removed. This would be something that would have to be agreed through any lease agreement.

Members enquired as to whether any other companies had been approached regarding the provision of solar panels. The Head of Housing and Waste Management explained that there were not many companies provided PV Panels through Roof Lease Schemes. He had taken advice regarding the procurement process and because of the specialised area that this work fell into legally the Council did not have go through the tendering process.

Members were all in agreement that this work should be progressed.

RESOLVED:

- (A) That the principle of the proposed scheme submitted by Staffordshire Community Energy to provide community owned photovoltaic panels for further Council owned dwellings is supported.
- (B) That subject to further development of the proposed community owned photovoltaic panel scheme, a report is submitted for consideration by Cabinet.

22. Place (Housing) Priority Delivery Plan 2013-14

Consideration was given to the Report of the Head of Housing and Waste Management (Item 6.1-6.8).

The Head of Housing and Waste Management explained that on item 6.4 regarding average re-let time for void dwellings and the target of 26 days was not met during this quarter. This was due to the impact of the social sector size criteria resulting with tenants wishing to 'down size' to smaller properties. Potential figures for the Quarter 3 showed that the target was now being met.

RESOLVED:

The report was noted.

23. Consultation on the Future Funding of the Housing Ombudsman

Consideration was given to the Report of the Head of Housing and Waste Management (Item 7.1-7.6).

The Head of Housing and Waste Management reported that under the Localism Act complaints from tenants regarding social landlords had moved from the Local Government Ombudsman to the Housing Ombudsman. However, the Local Government Ombudsman continues to deal with homelessness cases.

At the present there is no charge for the Council regarding the Ombudsman's service. However, from 2014 onwards the Council will be charged in accordance with the current 'Housing Association Scheme. In addition the government propose to introduce a two tier charging model for implementation 2016. This would compromise

- I.A fixed annual fee based on the number of dwelling owned by the member landlord.
- II.A variable "case fee" specific to the cost of dealing with complaints, calculated in relation to the number of complaints received from individual member landlords.

Members questioned the proposed response to the "two tier" system and the

bureaucracy regarding the charging system. It was felt that the charge would incentivise landlords to deal appropriately with complaints to negate the need for the involvement of the Housing Ombudsman. The Head of Housing and Waste Management understood the reason for questioning the proposed response and the Government's aim to get as many complaints settled by the landlords quickly and effectively.

RESOLVED:

That the Council's response to the Department for Communities and Local Government Consultation Paper 'Future Funding of the Housing Ombudsman' is agreed.

24. Out of Hours Repairs Service Review

Consideration was given to the Report of the Head of Housing and Waste Management (Item 8.1-8.6)

The Head of Housing and Waste Management gave the background to the Out of Hours Repairs Service and how it operates when offices are closed. Depending on the severity of the reported fault there is a 24 hour window within which to deal with the fault.

Members expressed their thanks to the Out of Hours service and said that their constituents had received an excellent service.

Members queried where flooding or fire damage would affect tenants. The Head of Housing and Waste Management explained that on occasions where fire/flood had rendered the property uninhabitable and the tenant could not make alternative arrangements then the Council would provide temporary accommodation.

Members asked whether household insurance would be beneficial to the tenants. The Head of Housing and Waste Management explained that tenants were encouraged to take out insurance and that the Council had an insurance scheme which they could pay towards with their rent. However, it was the tenants' choice to decide whether they wanted insurance or not.

Members raised the issue regarding a water supply that had caused damage and whether the Council would be liable. The Head of Housing and Waste Management explained that if a radiator was not fitted correctly and resulted in water damage then that would be our fault. However, if the radiator leaked after a long period of time then that would be down to general wear and tear.

RESOLVED

The report was noted.

25. Review of Work Programme – 2013-14 Municipal Year

Consideration was given to the Housing PDC Work Programme for 2013-14 (Item 9.1).

RESOLVED:

That the updated Housing PDC Work Programme for 2013-14 be noted.

The meeting closed at 5.25pm

CHAIRMAN